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# Michigan Dietetic Association

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*Commitment to Health through Nutrition*

[www.eatrightmich.org](http://www.eatrightmich.org)

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To: State of Michigan House Health Policy Committee

From: Charity Simpkins, RD  
Legislative Director, Michigan Dietetic Association

My name is Charity Simpkins. I am a dietitian and Legislative Director of the Michigan Dietetic Association. I represent over 2000 dietitians who live and work in Michigan. Our mission is to promote optimal nutrition and well being for all people in the state of Michigan.

I want to thank you for allowing me to address why licensing dietitians and nutritionists is essential for the safety and health of Michigan residents. Dietitians and nutritionists possess at least a Bachelor's Degree in foods and nutrition, followed by 900 hours of supervised internship. They are then required to pass a national credentialing exam. Dietitians are also required to obtain 75 hours of continuing education every 5 years in order to stay current on optimal nutrition information. Beyond this, many dietitians and nutritionists go on to pursue Master's Degrees or certifications in specialty areas in order to provide the best care to their patients.

The majority of work that a dietitian and nutritionist is involved in is in the treatment and prevention of chronic diseases by providing medical nutrition therapy. Approximately 30% of dietitians are employed in hospitals, but they also work for HMOs, private practice or other health-care facilities. In addition, a large number of dietitians work in community and public health settings and

academia and research. A growing number of dietitians work in the food and nutrition industry, in business, journalism, sports nutrition, corporate wellness programs and other non-traditional work settings. You will see dietitians working in dialysis centers, burn clinics, and neo-natal care settings, as nutrition therapy is an integral part of recovery and care for these patients.

There are three key issues that underscore why dietitians in the State of Michigan should be licensed:

**1. Michigan residents deserve to know which individuals in Michigan are qualified by education, experience, and examination to provide quality nutrition care.**

Dietitians and Nutritionists, as healthcare professionals, practice using evidence-based guidelines which are scientifically based. We assess, make recommendations, and work collaboratively with our patients or clients. We work with other healthcare professionals to optimize care for our clients/patients.

Without licensure, anyone can use the title of dietitian or nutritionist. This is THE problem in Michigan. At this time there is no regulation or oversight – anyone can practice nutrition therapy, and in fact, the term “dietitian” and “nutritionist” are often used interchangeably. The same is true for physician/doctor or lawyer/attorney. Dietitians are the single identifiable group of health care professionals with requirements necessary to provide nutrition therapy. We are the leading source of information about nutrition. But the

Michigan consumer needs some reassurance that we are credible – licensing would do this.

## **2. Registered Dietitians can help contain health care costs.**

Economically, licensing registered dietitians makes sense. Eight of the 10 leading causes of death, including coronary heart disease, stroke, some types of cancer, and diabetes mellitus, are related to diet and lifestyle. The increasing costs of treating chronic conditions among the aging population and among young people are driving health care spending. Registered dietitians have demonstrated that we can help to contain these increases in health care costs. Medicare Part B, as you know, recognizes that Medical Nutrition Therapy conducted by a Registered Dietitian is an integral part of treatment for diabetes and is cost effective.

Many national studies and the Michigan Hyperlipidemia Study, in particular, have shown that medical nutrition therapy impacts health care costs by decreasing the amount of medication required and by delaying and even preventing complications.

## **3. Licensing dietitians in Michigan will help protect Michigan consumers from receiving inaccurate and incorrect nutrition advice which can lead to increased health care costs.**

The residents of Michigan need to be protected from unqualified people. The media bombards the public with many mixed messages regarding nutrition and food. The public is confused and frustrated. For example: people with chronic

disease such as diabetes, cancer, or heart disease are particularly vulnerable to misinformation.

The risk of harm to Michigan consumers is real.

In summary, licensure of Dietitians in Michigan can have a positive impact on the health of Michigan consumers and help contain health care costs by:

1. providing Michigan residents evidence-based medical nutrition guidelines that have been proven to reduce health care costs
2. assisting residents in Michigan in identifying qualified nutrition practitioners that follow a standardized practice of care,
3. and by providing a licensure bill that is fiscally neutral. The registered dietitians who become licensed under this bill will fund this. It will not be a burden for Michigan taxpayers.

Michigan is one of only six states in which there is NO legal recognition of Dietitians. The Michigan Dietetic Association urges you to support the legal recognition of dietitians.

Thank you,

Charity Simpkins, RD